INTERMESTIC POLICY INITIATIVE

FP4A FOUNDATION

LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON US FOREIGN POLICY

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LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

I am thrilled to share our report on the Intermestic Policy Initiative, a groundbreaking project undertaken by Foreign Policy for America Foundation (FPAF). This report encapsulates the culmination of several listening sessions and roundtable conversations conducted with local stakeholders and leaders in five diverse cities across the United States: Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, and Miami.

At FPAF, we recognized the pressing need to bridge the gap between the foreign policy establishment and everyday Americans. Traditional foreign policy discussions often overlook the perspectives and concerns of local communities, leading to policies that may not fully address Americans' needs. The Intermestic Policy Initiative sought to shift this paradigm by exploring intermestic issues—those that transcend the traditional boundaries of foreign and domestic policy—and amplifying the voices of local leaders who are often excluded from such dialogues.

We firmly believe that foreign policy is not an abstract concept but a deeply personal and tangible force that impacts the lives of individuals and communities across the country. By engaging with trusted community leaders, small business owners, faith leaders, activists, and experts in each city, we aimed to understand the direct implications of intermestic issues on Americans' daily lives. We listened to their concerns, aspirations, and experiences to gain a comprehensive and diverse understanding of these complex challenges.

This report delves into five key intermestic issues: immigration, democracy and human rights, climate change, economic policy, and public or global health. Through the discussions held in our listening sessions, we identified common threads and unique insights that reflect the nuanced realities of each city. The diverse range of perspectives presented here underscores the need to consider local contexts and foster inclusive policy dialogues that account for the rich tapestry of America's diverse communities.

As you navigate this report, you will encounter the stories and experiences of everyday Americans whose lives are impacted by the policies made in Washington, DC. Their narratives serve as powerful reminders that the decisions made in distant capitals reverberate within local communities, shaping the very fabric of their existence. We believe that foreign policy should not be an abstract exercise but a collaborative endeavor that acknowledges the interdependencies between local communities, regions, and the broader global landscape.

The report also acknowledges the pivotal role that cities play in foreign policy. Recognizing this, the State Department has appointed a Special Representative for Subnational Diplomacy, underscoring the significance of local leaders engaging one another at an international level. Our project underscores the importance of embracing this local perspective and harnessing the potential of cities to represent their communities' interests and drive change where traditional foreign policy approaches may fall short. To ensure cities and states can sustain and expand their effective engagement on this front, it is crucial to garner support and involvement from civil society leaders and local stakeholders who can act as trusted messengers within and as advocates for their communities. Recognizing their vital role as key stakeholders, our project actively sought out the participation of these individuals. We strongly urge the foreign policy community to deepen their engagement with these critical voices going forward.

We hope that this report serves as a catalyst for change—an invitation to the foreign policy establishment to reimagine its processes and engage local leaders and stakeholders in a more meaningful and inclusive manner. By incorporating the insights and experiences of those directly affected by these issues, we can forge a foreign policy agenda that genuinely reflects the aspirations and interests of all Americans.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. Together, we can build a more inclusive, accountable, and effective foreign policy that resonates with the lived experiences of individuals and communities across our country.

In Solidarity,

Kristina Biyad
Outreach Director
Foreign Policy for America Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Too often, Washington foreign policy discussions are divorced from the lived experiences of Americans. The esoteric language of policymakers and think tank scholars typically begins with existing national security policy, recommending modest departures from it, and is often limited to ongoing debates within established policy circles without consideration of actual and potential outcomes for Americans. Structural biases within the foreign policy community also create barriers to engaging perspectives from communities of color, women, young voices, and those geographically distant from Washington, DC. In contrast to domestic policy, which benefits from decentralized structures of local, state, and national officials, foreign policymaking is both physically distant from and less accountable to local communities. The result is the sense—often articulated by constituents—that foreign policy does not affect their lives or has been captured by corrupt, distant elites.

Since taking office, the Biden administration has skillfully blurred the line between foreign and domestic policy, demonstrating the connection between America's role in the world and the security and prosperity of the American people.

The rupture in trust between local communities and the foreign policy establishment is not a recent development. In the aftermath of the 2016 elections, many within Washington's foreign policy establishment acknowledged the imperative to restore this trust and bridge the growing disconnect between most Americans and those who conduct foreign policy on their behalf. Despite certain advancements made, it is evident that more work is needed.

As the public's trust in DC-based policymakers and institutions dwindle, Washington must reckon with deteriorating support for principled internationalist foreign policy—the enlightened self-interest that has guided U.S. foreign policy with such success in the eight decades following the Second World War. Now is a critical moment for the foreign policy community to rethink its policymaking approach. This starts with systematically engaging diverse local stakeholders in the design of foreign policy and the mechanisms for communication and accountability.

President Joe Biden, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken have embraced and worked to champion "Foreign Policy for the Middle Class"—the idea of building a U.S. foreign policy that enhances the economic and social mobility of Americans. Many top foreign policy decision-makers in President Biden's administration were the thought leaders behind the transformative Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report, "Making U.S. Foreign Policy Work Better for the Middle Class."[1] In his inaugural press conference, Sullivan pledged to work relentlessly to "keep our country and our people safe," and added that President Biden had tasked his team to "[reimagine] our national security" in light of the extraordinary crises that today affect Americans' safety, including "the pandemic, the economic crisis, the climate crisis, technological disruption, threats to democracy, racial injustice, and inequality in all forms."[2] Secretary Blinken, in his first public speech as Secretary of State, shared that the Biden administration established its foreign policy priorities by asking themselves three basic, yet critical, questions: "What will our foreign policy mean for American workers and their families? What do we need to do around the world to make us stronger here at home? What do we need to do at home to make us stronger in the world?"[3] All of this was the culmination of the idea that policymakers, lawmakers, and thought leaders should seek to break down the barriers that artificially divide foreign and domestic policy.

Since taking office, the Biden administration has skillfully blurred the line between foreign and domestic policy, demonstrating the connection between America's role in the world and the security and prosperity of the American people. Their approach is present throughout the 2022 National Security Strategy, which positions America's success abroad as dependent upon its strength and resiliency at home, often attributing domestic prosperity to strong U.S. leadership abroad.[4]

Empowered by this vision, Foreign Policy for America Foundation (FPAF) launched the Intermestic Policy Initiative to explore issues that crosscut the traditional boundaries of foreign and domestic policy, to better understand how these issues impact Americans' lives, and to engage local stakeholders across the country in meaningful conversation about U.S. foreign policy. The word "intermestic" was originally coined by scholar Abraham Lowenthal and was used by Latin Americanists to refer to the intertwined domestic and international aspects of U.S. policy toward Latin America. For the sake of this project, we repurposed the word "intermestic" to describe all issues that transcend the artificial divide between foreign and domestic policy. There are several topics that fit the description, and recognizing this important insight could help to correct structural flaws in the design, execution, and communication of U.S. foreign policy.

The Intermestic Policy Initiative was launched in the belief that the artificial foreign-domestic division of these issues is not a product of how Americans think about them, but of how the federal government responds to them—typically framing them in terms of process (i.e., strengthen ties with allies) rather than outcome (i.e., reduce costs at the supermarket). Removing this basic human element from the policymaking process has left the U.S. foreign policy community misinformed and disconnected from the realities facing Americans across the country.

The mission of FPAF is to promote informed foreign policy decision-making by engaging diverse local audiences, educating congressional leaders, and elevating voices for diplomacy. The Intermestic Policy Initiative took us outside of the Beltway and Acela Corridor into cities across the country to learn about how these issues impact local communities. By listening to local leaders and directly involving them in the policymaking process, we can begin to restore the trust between the foreign policy establishment and the American public. We are convinced that is the first, necessary step toward developing foreign policy that delivers for all Americans.

APPROACH

Our project explored five intermestic issues at the forefront of our country's national debate: immigration, democracy and human rights, climate change, economic policy, and public health. Each of these serve as concrete examples of how foreign policy challenges can directly impact Americans' lives.

To gather a wide range of local perspectives on the intermestic issues we identified, we conducted focus group-style discussions, which we called listening sessions, with community leaders in five cities: Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, and Miami. These cities were selected for two main reasons: They are major American population hubs and, together, they offer a geographically diverse cross section of the Midwest and the South, two regions typically underrepresented in foreign policy discussions.

During the initial 45–60 minutes of each session, local experts provided a comprehensive overview of their unique concerns and perspectives on the specific issue at hand and addressed questions from the DC-based policymakers.

In each city, we convened listening sessions with trusted local community leaders. We chose participants first by surveying top leaders in each city to help identify local figures trusted to represent their communities. We sought leaders within each city's diaspora, educational, faith, and small-business communities. Through a series of conversations, beginning with our city-level inquiries, we assembled groups of 12-15 people per city. Groups represented a variety of backgrounds, and were composed of well-known individuals, considered influential by others in their communities. Here again, the results differed based on location: Detroit's diaspora is heavily Arab American, whereas Miami's is more Latin American. In each case, we sought to assemble groups reflective of the city's underlying population dynamics.

Participants brought a range of expertise and experiences to the listening sessions in each city. They included leaders of educational and religious organizations; state and local-level legislators; lawyers, nonprofit leaders, community organizers, small business owners, physicians, and at least one former professional basketball player. They brought experience working on issues ranging from child welfare to nuclear security to housing policy to refugee resettlement to any number of other community-focused pursuits. In many cases, too, they brought distinctly international perspectives, as immigrants (from Burma, Canada, Lebanon, Colombia, Albania, and many other countries), as scholars, and as veterans of federal foreign-policymaking and implementation. Their stories are shared throughout the report, with some participants' names and affiliations having been omitted or changed for anonymity purposes.

During each listening session, we conducted lightly moderated discussions with the participants, beginning with two broad questions for each person: What keeps you up at night, and what opportunities are you most excited about? We focused the remainder of each discussion on the handful of intermestic issues that emerged organically in response to the opening questions in each room. For instance, the Miami conversation prioritized immigration, the area in which participants themselves expressed the most concern. The Chicago conversation spent more time on democracy, human rights, and the United States' role in the world.

After conducting the city-based listening sessions, we assembled five intimate virtual roundtable conversations consisting of approximately five to seven local participants each. During these sessions, local participants engaged in issue-specific discussions with two

Washington, DC-based policymakers. Each of these roundtable sessions lasted for two hours, with a focused emphasis on one of the five intermestic issues. During the initial 45-60 minutes of each session, local experts provided a comprehensive overview of their unique concerns and perspectives on the specific issue at hand and addressed questions from the DC-based policymakers. Following this exchange, both the local and DC-based experts collaborated to brainstorm recommendations or considerations that policymakers should take into account. To ensure a thorough and inclusive approach, the FPAF team maintained ongoing conversations with all local participants. This allowed us to refine and finalize the considerations for policymakers found throughout the report.

Given that the Initiative's conversations centered on cities, and involved city leaders and activists, their perspectives tended to reflect urban concerns. This imposes some limits on the findings. A conversation among community leaders in Illinois's agricultural belt would no doubt yield different insights about climate change than a similar conversation in Chicago. A discussion in a Texas border town would likely paint a different picture of immigration than one in Dallas. And since cities tend to be more politically left-leaning than rural areas, participants tended to offer more liberal views on intermestic challenges than what we might have heard in other geographies.

We consider this initiative and the recommendations it offers as a starting point to build deeper connections with more communities beyond those represented in this report. With this initial research as proof of concept—that local insights across America aren't just worth listening to, but indispensable in formulating a foreign policy that works for all Americans—we hope to expand on it in future reports to gather perspectives beyond city limits.

WHY LOCATION MATTERS

Despite the geographic diversity of the cities studied, the conversations revealed a common throughline: each community is dealing with the profound effects of decisions made elsewhere, despite having little-to-no say in the decision-making process. This report aims to take a first step toward correcting this mismatch. Our hope is to do this by gathering the insights of local leaders, helping spotlight their cities' existing foreign-policy infrastructure, and drawing a connection between local leaders and the DC-based foreign-policy community.

Heads of state visiting the United States often aren't simply coming to Washington. They may have relationships with local political and civil-society leaders, who are in turn able to represent their communities' interests abroad.

Some cities have already demonstrated the role that local leaders can play in foreign (or intermestic) policy. Heads of state visiting the United States often aren't simply coming to Washington. They may have relationships with local political and civil-society leaders, who are in turn able to represent their communities' interests abroad. With the proper resources, cities can also lead on issues where their leaders perceive Washington to lag: Los Angeles, for instance, following the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement to combat climate change, adopted its own climate action plan. Recognizing that cities and other localities are "on the front lines of our most pressing global issues," Secretary of State Antony Blinken recently appointed the State Department's first Special Representative for Subnational Diplomacy, Ambassador Nina Hachigan, who previously served as Los Angeles' first deputy mayor for international affairs.[5] Cities can also help forge connections in the other direction, connecting national and international actors to the concerns of exurban and rural communities in their states. We saw this play out most recently at the State Department's Cities Summit of the Americas, which convened thousands of city leaders from across the Western Hemisphere in Denver, Colorado for conversations around migration, energy, climate, and more.

Furthermore, our discussions in each of the cities we visited demonstrated how the impacts of intermestic issues differ not just between U.S. regions, but within them. Immigration patterns, for instance, look different in Southern cities than in Midwestern ones. Southern cities in border states such as Texas grapple with different challenges than cities such as Atlanta. Climate change is an obvious threat to a Southern coastal city such as Miami, but in the Midwest, it's contributing to lakeshore erosion in Chicago and economic disparities among flood victims in Detroit. These findings reinforce our view that, for a foreign policy to work for all Americans, it should start with a granular understanding of Americans' varying regional and local needs.

EXPLORING LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON INTERMESTIC ISSUES

Immigration

One point of consensus emerged from conversations across all five cities in this report: America's current immigration system is not working. Participants highlighted different symptoms of this failure in different discussions: fear that undocumented loved ones could be deported after decades living and working in the United States; a need for more immigration to address labor shortages; U.S. foreign policies that drive immigration—such as sanctions on Venezuela—without adequate domestic policies to accommodate it.

No city we examined, however far from an international border, was untouched by immigration. But Miami, a diverse, international city in a state where immigrants make up over a quarter of the workforce, offers an especially vivid example of the linkage between foreign and domestic policy—and indeed the impossibility of separating the two.[6] "Immigration," said a journalist in Miami, is "to me probably the most important intermestic issue there is." He is preoccupied by Haiti, an effectively failed state governed largely by gangs just a two-hour flight from the city. "We're talking a lot these days about Cuban and Venezuelan migrants coming over the border," he said, "but the volume of Haitian migrants that we've got coming toward our shores is overwhelming as well."

Following some declines in border-crossings in the Trump years, border apprehensions have soared under the Biden administration, with record numbers reported in 2022.[7] Florida, along with Texas, made national headlines throughout 2022 for transporting migrants to Democratic-run cities and states to encourage tougher border enforcement—with Florida organizing a notorious flight of mostly Venezuelan asylum-seekers to Martha's Vineyard in the fall. "To be perfectly honest, what we're seeing right now looks more like an open-border policy than we've ever seen before, even if that is still not the policy," remarked another Miami-based journalist covering Latin America.

Community members in Miami and elsewhere identified several U.S. policies that they perceived as drivers of migration, including U.S. sanctions further damaging a weak economy in Venezuela, and U.S.-based arms smuggling fueling gang violence in Haiti. "Sanctions always worsen the economy of countries," said a Miami-based journalist. They're not the only factor, she noted, and governments mismanage their own economies. "But sanctions always make the economy worse. So if you support that, you have to be able to support mass migration from those countries. One thing leads to another. It's obvious." Yet another participant noted that disrupting arms trafficking to Haiti might require sanctioning individuals linked to it. Others cited other proactive policy steps the United States could take, beyond its own border, to affect migration. Miami-based economist and political

analyst Marco Fieri pointed out: "Below our border, every country suffered significantly economically due to the pandemic, and they have not recovered as they should have… And that should be one of the most pressing issues for the U.S., and Canada as well, to solve the issues economically that we are having in our hemisphere."

Meanwhile, for those that arrive in the United States, it's not always easy to stay and contribute. Two participants in Dallas highlight both the immigrant dream and the immigrant nightmare. Salman Bhojani immigrated to the United States from Pakistan at age 19. He mopped floors and cleaned gas-station bathrooms for $6 an hour, and now owns gas stations, hotels, and other businesses. He met his wife in the United States and raised two kids here; he's since been elected, as a Democrat, to a seat in the Texas House of Representatives. "I mean, that's an American dream story," he said. "And I think that can only be true if immigrants from all over the world can come freely to the United States. This is the land of opportunity, right?"

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Another Dallas-based participant, who came to the United States undocumented at the age of seven and has since received at least a temporary reprieve under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, remarked: "My personal nightmare is getting deported" and separated from his family. His parents remain undocumented and at risk of deportation themselves, 25 years after their arrival. He himself attended Yale on scholarship but could not put his education to use, as a teacher in Dallas, until DACA enabled him to get a work permit in 2012. He's now on leave due to a paperwork mishap that allowed his work permit to expire, and he knows of other DACA recipients in the same situation. Some 600,000 young immigrants depend on DACA, an executive-branch policy that has never been codified into law and remains the subject of legal challenges.[8] A federal appeals court last fall ruled the policy unlawful executive overreach.[9]

His experience points to the policy failures that greet immigrants once they're in the United States. A Dallas-based small business owner noted that he faces worker shortages even as undocumented immigrants are unable to enter the workforce. A Dallas-based attorney pointed out that many people who live in the city "don't realize that the people that have been taking care of their parents, the people that are taking care of their kids, people who are putting up their Christmas lights—that these are folks that haven't been able to get out of the shadows." On the other hand, she said, people who hire undocumented immigrants for such jobs realize they don't have to pay them as much as they might pay someone else.

Finally, Dr. Abdul El-Sayed, a physician, epidemiologist, and educator based in Detroit, brought up the separate question of refugee admissions and treatment, and how the United States will absorb those fleeing conflict or climate disasters overseas. "My guess is that the conversation about Ukrainian refugees is going to look very different than the conversation about Afghan refugees or climate refugees from Western Africa or South America. And that is in large part because of race."

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

- **Fix the backlog plaguing the U.S. immigration system.** Every major piece of the U.S. immigration system—refugee admissions, asylum claims, skilled labor and other economic migration, and basic border control over illegal immigration—is overwhelmed. The slower and more difficult the legal pathways

to the United States, the more attractive illegal options become to some would-be migrants. A basic first step to streamline legal immigration pathways would simply be to hire more immigration judges and consular officials to adjudicate asylum claims and process visas respectively.

- **Create a resource hub for new immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.** Immigrants within the United States require different types and amounts of support, and must navigate a patchwork of different federal, state, local, and private service providers. Often this means they don't actually know what is available to them. Recognizing that internet access cannot be assumed in many cases, many others would benefit from a centralized, online hub in which arrivals to the United States can type in basic information about their location and status and receive a tailored list of available resources.

Democracy & Human Rights

Voting difficulties, inequality, violent cities, a perceived erosion of rights, the spread of misinformation, declining trust in institutions: These were the worries we heard in local discussions concerning the health of American democracy. The spread of democratic and human-rights problems at home, furthermore, fostered doubts among many participants that the United States has the moral authority—or even the wherewithal—to promote democracy and human rights overseas. "I had a kid telling me … I love what you're trying to do, but how can you talk to me about Ukraine when 63rd Street looks like Ukraine?" remarked Chicago Scholars CEO Jeffery Beckham, Jr. "You can't fix somebody else's house until you fix your own house," said Chicago native and nuclear weapons abolitionist Mari Fanes. On the other hand, America's own perceived democratic backsliding—what Leighton Watson, an attorney and environmentalist in Detroit, called the "cracks" in the American ideal, always present but increasingly apparent through globalized media—may have "a ripple effect internationally."

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a flurry of rule changes and emergency efforts to expand access to voting. Community members in Atlanta are now dealing with the backlash. In the summer of 2021, Georgia's state legislature passed a law that, among other things, restricts the use of ballot drop boxes, gives voters less time to request absentee ballots, and tightens up identification requirements for absentee ballots.[10] "People who had been running the state for the past 20 years saw that all these people who'd never voted before, voted [in the 2020 election], and they didn't like that idea," said David Worley, an attorney and former member of the Georgia State Election Board. (President Joe Biden won Georgia by about 12,000 votes out of 5 million.) "The reaction has been to try to sharply curtail the use of both absentee ballots and drop boxes, and to do other things … the aim of which has been to restrict the number and kinds of people who are voting in this state."

Citizens' voices are also being "increasingly muted" through gerrymandering, according to an attorney and political leader in Dallas. Unrepresentative legislative districts, in combination with what she called voter suppression laws, plus run-of-the-mill disengagement—Dallas ranks among the bottom of major U.S. cities for turnout in municipal elections—make her worry about living in a society where marginalized communities and the poor just don't vote, because it's too difficult and doesn't seem to matter anyway. "Civic engagement, civic involvement is just becoming perilously less important," she said. "And so you have a small group of people who then control the elections, control the dynamics of any discussion. … So many people have lost their voice in terms of American politics and democracy."

Whether as cause or effect of this dynamic, Americans don't trust their institutions like they used to. Much of the community discussion in Chicago centered on the sense of apathy and hopelessness among young people. Cantor David Berger of the KAM Isaiah Israel Congregation in the city, is a self-described "child of the '80s" who said he was unhappy with the election of Republican President George W. Bush but never feared for the survival of the U.S. government

itself when he was growing up. Now, he said, the kids he works with at his synagogue, who grew up in the Trump years, "see a vulnerability to our country that none of us grew up seeing, that like literally the whole system could collapse on their heads, which leads them to be less invested." For some, this fear extends beyond U.S. democracy to include the entire planet under the effects of climate change. "I have a 20-year old who's had every privilege in the world," remarked Eric, a father and political activist, in the same discussion. "She jokes, like, 'What's it matter what I do after college? In 50 years, this planet's not going to be here.'"

Notwithstanding its own challenges, the United States still has a role to play promoting democracy and protecting human rights around the world, discussion participants argued in different cities. Yet several also highlighted perceived double standards or even incoherence in the way the United States and its international partners implement such policies. U.S. support for Ukraine's defense against Russia's invasion was a case in point. "I find it ironic that the United States will admirably help Ukraine, but our neighbors in Haiti, who are in war, our immediate neighbors, right near our backyard, are ignored," said a Miami-based educator who was born in the Dominican Republic and grew up in Brazil. Scarlett Lanzas, an impact entrepreneur and non-profit leader also based in Miami, noted that even while the United States sanctions countries such as Venezuela, international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, in which the United States is the largest shareholder, are still offering loans to the same countries. In Detroit, a local Arab American leader remarked that the Syrian refugee families she works with see America's tough stance against Russia's aggression in Ukraine and wonder where the United States was in 2015, when Syrians were under bombardment by the same Russian government.

The irony is that even America's perceived foreign-policy success protecting Ukrainian democracy invites criticism and questions about why it can't do the same elsewhere—including at home. The Biden administration's Ukraine policy shows what can be achieved, or at least what bad outcomes can be prevented, with enough will, focus, and resources. Some community members we spoke to wondered why the United States won't invest the same way in protecting others—whether they're Syrian, Haitian, or American kids in Chicago.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

- **Rebuild trust between local communities and the federal government.** Local power does not lie solely in the hands of local and state elected officials. Local community leaders—teachers, faith leaders, small business owners, community activists, etc.—hold incredible power and influence, though federal policymakers rarely, if ever, engage them on issues that impact their communities. As an increasing number of Americans continue to lose faith in the country's national institutions, they are looking to local community leaders for solutions. Misinformation is further fracturing the trust between local communities and the federal government, and local communities are looking for credible messengers whom they respect to deliver information and advocate for their interests. Federal policymakers should build relationships with such messengers, to share information in both directions and better tailor their policies to local needs.

- **Protect human rights at home and abroad.** Participants were clear that protecting human rights and democracy at home does not equate to defunding international human rights or democracy promotion work. Indeed, these pursuits reinforce one another: The United States needs to set an example for the world by protecting its own democracy and the rights of its citizens and, to the extent it fails to do so, the United States will find itself struggling to promote such ideals elsewhere while also losing domestic public support for such initiatives. By contrast, demonstrating that the world's most powerful democracy can secure rights and deliver prosperity makes the job of American diplomats that much easier, and the attraction of America's model that much more profound. Washington-based democracy promoters and rights activists should help facilitate connections between domestic and international human-rights activists and organizations, so that each can share lessons and learn from one another, and so that local communities are valued, consulted, and involved in decisions about how best to promote human rights and democracy.

Climate Change

Climate change is a global problem with varying local impacts. The climate crisis asserts itself differently from one city to another in this study, but its effects can also differ from neighborhood to neighborhood.

Detroit's experience is an illustration. The southwest part of the city is home to what was once reportedly Michigan's most polluted ZIP code, 48217.[11] The area's population is also largely Black and working class. Laprisha Daniels, a Detroit-based environmental justice activist, noted in our discussion that generally lower-income areas in the city experience worse environmental quality and worse health outcomes than higher-income areas. These disparities are felt during disaster response as well, she said: During floods, relief has gone to homeowners and not lower-income renters. Poorer residents trying to clean and air out their own homes risk exposure to lead dust, from the lead paint in Detroit's older and cheaper houses, as they open and close windows. These, Laprisha said, are "some of the real ways that just communities that are under-resourced are trying to deal with climate change." Dr. Abdul El-Sayed, an epidemiologist also in Detroit, noted: "People in circles like this talk about climate change as if the crisis is imminent. And yet there are people who have been suffering the consequences of this crisis for decades."

This is not a matter of urban livability, but of economic viability for agriculture-based states such as Georgia—and for those who depend on their production.

Chicago, too, shows that climate change is not just imminent but present. "The city is not ready, physically, for the changes that have already happened," said one Chicago-based faith leader. He noted that the city is experiencing fewer "precipitation events" now than ever in its history, but that more total precipitation falls per year, overwhelming drainage infrastructure that was built for a different kind of climate. (Illinois as a whole actually had lower precipitation than normal in 2022, but Chicago experienced some heavy rains that pushed its 2022 totals higher than normal).[12] Again, this "has more impact on the neighborhoods that haven't been prioritized by the city for the [necessary] kinds of redevelopment—different trees that need to be planted, different kinds of water management," he said. Climate change is already affecting daily life in Chicago across a range of issues from lake-shore erosion to road quality to food access.

This is not a matter of urban livability, but of economic viability for agriculture-based states such as Georgia—and for those who depend on their production. "The impact is taking place not as much in the metro area as in the state of Georgia," said Dr. Jagdish Sheth, an

Atlanta-based scholar and educator. "You saw the last hurricane basically destroying both the pecan crop, which is one of the largest in the nation, an export commodity, but also the peaches, they were destroyed almost permanently." Following Hurricane Michael in 2018, the Georgia Department of Agriculture estimated a total commodity loss of over $2 billion across Georgia's agriculture sectors and $560 million in losses for Georgia's pecan farmers alone.[13]

Climate change, furthermore, is a driver for another key intermestic issue: immigration. A Dallas-based public health leader pointed out that even as climate change is affecting the United States, it's driving people to the United States for opportunities as their own agriculture industries and food supplies fail. "They have nowhere else to go," she said. "Immigration as it's connected to climate change is really the connection that we have to make, so that we can make better arguments for the president at the federal level, to say this is why we need to push forward his agenda in terms of responses to climate change."

Other participants drew a line from climate-related decisions made by the United States in the past to today's geopolitical challenges, including strategic competition with Russia and China. Michigan State Senator Adam Hollier pointed out that the transition to a green economy—including electric cars and solar panels—depends on authoritarian China, and its labor practices, to mine lithium because the United States won't do so itself, "even though we have it, for a whole host of reasons." He went on: "We can't say we want solar panels and that that's the answer, if we are unwilling to have a real discussion about what it takes to get from beginning to end."

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

- **Support local implementation of new federal climate legislation.** While national leaders rightfully celebrate groundbreaking legislation like the Inflation Reduction Act becoming law in August 2022, local communities are concerned about their leaders' ability to implement these policies in practice and are skeptical that their communities will benefit from the additional resources allocated to them. Federal policymakers should work with trusted local community leaders to communicate the availability of resources and advocate for proper implementation.
- **Acknowledge and mitigate the hyperlocal effects of climate change.** Doomsday scenarios invite despair and paralysis, but there are concrete steps policymakers can take right now to break the climate-change issue into manageable pieces and help people dealing with its effects. Of course this means better preparation for major storms and wildfires — and aid to the victims in the aftermath — but it also means less dramatic measures, identified in concert with local leaders and communicated clearly to constituents. This can involve, for example, investments in infrastructure to resist flooding, support for indoor play spaces for kids for when it's too hot to play outside, or working with schools on how to stay open during unprecedented heat waves.

Economic Policy

One surprising feature of our conversations around the country was the extent to which international trade policy—the subject of so much debate and shifting consensus in Washington over the past half-decade—did not come up as the central issue of concern. Economic policy, however, did feature as a component of numerous other issues we discussed, including immigration, climate change, and democracy and human rights.

Immigration, for instance, is unavoidably an economic issue, and several community leaders in different cities argued that the United States would benefit from more of it (albeit more effectively regulated). In Dallas, neuroscientist Dr. John Biggan noted the aging societies of Germany and Japan, where low birthrates are leading to smaller, older, and less productive populations. "The reason we [in the United States] have not suffered as much is because of immigration," he said. "One of the best things we could possibly do—if all you care about is money and all you care about is the economy—is really, really reform our immigration system, so

that we're bringing in people to contribute to that economy." A Dallas-based attorney replied that, while that dynamic may be well-recognized within the business community, "there are people that would say, it's not that the country will grow and will prosper as a result of this extraordinary immigrant population, it's that they're taking our jobs away."

Others noted economic forces as both cause and effect of climate change. As noted in the previous section, fossil fuels have powered the modern economy, and attempts to transition beyond them involve high costs. At the same time, climate change itself is inflicting high, if uneven, costs on people around the United States and the world. In Atlanta, Dr. Jagdish Sheth described the "consumer side" of climate change, that is, the extent of the carbon footprint generated in people's homes, for instance through insulation, synthetic materials, and refrigeration. The good news, he said, is that Atlantans seem receptive to making changes on the consumption side. Yet one effect of climate-mitigation efforts in the city, an Atlanta-based gender equity activist pointed out later, has been to make housing more expensive.

Meanwhile, community members associated a sense of hopelessness among Chicago's young people due to economic issues and a lack of opportunity. "When it comes to young people, and democracy, and their hope in it, I think it reflects their material conditions," said Xavier, a community educator and urban farmer in Chicago. "When young people come from communities that are neglected and sabotaged, and then they're labeled 'at-risk' and 'marginalized'—what democracy? … What is this thing I'm supposed to believe in when … I see my parents and the people around me work the hardest and bring the least home?" A Chicago-based gender equity activist recounted going to school to study policy, with hopes of running for office, believing that doing "A, B, C, one, two, three" would lead naturally to reaping the benefits. "And then when I left college, I realized I hit a wall because I'm a Black, queer, trans woman."

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

- **Engage local leaders on economic issues beyond trade.** Trade and globalization have undeniably shaped how Americans live, from how much they pay for goods to which industries are disappearing. But policymakers should also think beyond trade when considering the 'intermestic' components of economic policy. Our interlocutors highlighted several other issues, including the economic impact of the global pandemic; the economic arguments in favor of immigration (including to ease labor shortages); and how climate change affects the economy and vice versa.

- **Policymakers must address the growing wealth gap in the United States.** Income and wealth inequality in the United States surpasses that of most developed nations and has been rising for decades.[14] This growing disparity has fueled frustration among the majority of Americans, who perceive diminishing economic mobility and a widening gap between the wealthy and the rest of society.[15] Consequently, local communities have become more divided, and trust in democratic institutions has eroded. To begin bridging this wealth gap

and restore the faith of working Americans, it is crucial for policymakers to ensure that wealthy individuals and large corporations contribute their fair share. Taking a critical first step, President Biden has initiated efforts to establish a global minimum corporate tax rate of 15%, which will curtail the practice of multinational corporations evading taxes by channeling profits generated in the United States to lower-tax jurisdictions. To affect lasting change, Congress must proactively enact corporate tax reforms to adopt the global minimum corporate tax. While taxing corporations is not a substitute for taxing wealthy individuals, a progressive income tax system, in which wealthy individuals contribute their fair share, cannot function properly with unfairly low corporate tax rates. In systems with low corporate tax rates and higher individual rates, wealthy individuals are more inclined to incorporate in order to report their income through a company, subjecting them to a lower tax rate, rather than the higher personal income tax rates. In short, a global minimum tax rate of 15% will level the playing field globally and build the foundation for a more equitable domestic tax system in the United States.

Public Health

Public health, too, mainly arose in our conversations bound up in other issues. Most dramatically, the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects, for example, continue to shape the United States and the world in unpredictable ways—and the U.S. response to it, across two administrations, showcased both the necessity and limits of American leadership in coordinating and helping solve a truly global problem. Other public-health related issues in our conversations included how pandemic effects have driven migration; America's dismal health outcomes relative to its economic wealth; and the effects of climate change on public health.

An environmentalist and activist in Atlanta, reflected on the COVID-19 pandemic's lessons in global crisis response. The crisis "was one that required immense global cooperation and participation, namely through our distribution of vaccines throughout the entire globe, which unfortunately we've massively failed at. People [were] already talking about getting their fourth booster while billions of people still haven't received their first vaccine." To him the experience does not inspire hope about other global collective-action problems such as climate change. "If everything is driven with a profit motive with our global sphere, we're not going to solve these problems and things are going to continue to devolve and get worse."

This is an example where U.S. engagement, or lack thereof, outside its own borders has direct repercussions on what happens within them. As noted in a prior section, Marco Fieri in Miami pointed to the economic devastation wrought by the pandemic in the Western Hemisphere as a key driver of recent migration to the United States. An Atlanta-based environmentalist noted how the United States' unwillingness to distribute the vaccine more widely across the globe, and help slow down the pandemic elsewhere, has led to new variants forming overseas and reaching American shores.

Julie Johnson, who serves in the Texas House of Representatives, said that public health was her number one issue. If it were its own country, Texas would rank as the world's ninth wealthiest. However, when it comes to healthcare access, the state finds itself at the bottom as one of the five worst-performing U.S. states.[16] Texas also ranks last in terms of healthcare affordability and experienced the highest number of maternal deaths of any state in the United States between 2018 and 2022.[17, 18] "Our health-care access system is atrocious in this state," she said. "We really need to take a strong look at our employer-based model of health insurance," given that small businesses and the self-employed can barely afford insurance premiums.

Finally, several participants highlighted the critical connection between climate change and public health. Detroit environmentalist Laprisha Daniels shared that "the health effects of climate change that are of most concern locally include respiratory illness like asthma, heart disease and increased exposure to lead due to a lack of investment in infrastructure." This combination of factors weighs heavily on the city, which

Laprisha admits is "already overburdened." In Chicago, local physician Dr. Lee Francis listed heat extremes and waterborne pathogens as top concerns. He also noted that the health-care industry in the United States is responsible for about 8 percent of the country's carbon emissions.[19] "So there is an industry that's dealing with some of the effects of climate change in terms of human health, but also is contributing to it as well," he said. "So it's kind of a conundrum there, to figure out from a policy perspective."[20]

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

- **Prepare local communities to address the health effects of climate change.** Local participants spoke at length about the impact of the climate crisis on their communities' health and wellbeing. For example, exposure to air pollution from nearby airports increases the risk of asthma and cancer, and microparticles of iron in high pollution areas can lead to an increased rate of Alzheimer's disease. Additionally, rising global temperatures can lead to increased instances of infectious diseases, such as malaria or yellow fever, and deforestation increases the rate of zoonotic diseases, such as COVID-19. These threats vary by location and local leaders are best equipped to identify both existing and future potential health threats, but require additional support and a more cohesive national effort to address these concerns.
- **Better communicate the benefits of global health funding.** While Americans struggle with access to healthcare and care inequity here in the United States, it becomes increasingly difficult to garner support for global health funding. Americans are still feeling the effects of COVID-19 and are receptive to the argument that global health threats know no borders. While it's more difficult to communicate concrete benefits of prevention funding, U.S. officials should be prepared to communicate concrete outcome-based indicators that quantify the impact of existing global health programs (i.e., reporting the number of people across the world treated each year for HIV/AIDS or Tuberculosis through PEPFAR), which would help to communicate the cost-effectiveness of global health programming.

An Atlanta-based environmentalist noted how the United States' unwillingness to distribute the vaccine more widely across the globe, and help slow down the pandemic elsewhere, has led to new variants forming overseas and reaching American shores.

CONCLUSION

The Intermestic Policy Initiative set out to illustrate a different approach to inform U.S. foreign policy decision-making. Rather than starting with existing policy and exploring departures from it, we started with the perspectives of affected local communities and partnered with them to translate those local perspectives into considerations for policymakers working to improve outcomes. The foreign-domestic divide on issues from climate change to public health to democracy and human rights is not a product of how everyday Americans think about these issues, but rather a result of how Washington divides and approaches them. That made these issues particularly ripe for discussion at the local level. But we believe a broader set of foreign policy issues would benefit from proactive efforts to engage local stakeholders.

In each of our listening sessions, local participants were eager to partner in developing outcome-driven and locally-informed policy recommendations. While most participants had not engaged in similar foreign policy discussions in the past, that was not due to any lack of interest on their part but rather because they had never been approached by foreign policy decision-makers or scholars. Participants not only recognized the impact of foreign policy on their communities but also consistently offered to remain engaged and support similar efforts in the future.

We also saw hints of the distinct ways this approach can benefit the design and implementation of sound policy. Participants shared concrete anecdotes to illustrate the local effects of international events and U.S. foreign policy decisions, something that often eludes federal policymakers. They offered unique insights on the differentiated impacts of global forces on specific communities, including particularly the most vulnerable. Implicit in our conversations was the importance of identifying and communicating about potential trade-offs and synergies between local and international actions—investments, for example, in deploying vaccines at home and abroad. Clearly, these leaders would be valuable partners not only in the development and refinement of international policies but in communicating those strategies locally to garner and sustain public support.

Several initiatives work to bridge the gap between foreign and domestic policy. Most notably, the State Department recently launched an Office of Subnational Diplomacy, led by Special Representative Nina Hachigian. That office recognizes the vital role that local actors can play not only in the design of sound policy, but also in the execution of key aspects of U.S. foreign relations. Foreign Policy for America Foundation wholeheartedly endorses these endeavors. Likewise, we applaud efforts by cabinet officials and other senior leaders to more frequently travel to cities across the country.

But far more is needed. To build and sustain support for sound foreign policy, Washington policymakers need desperately to break out of the DC “bubble.” Genuine and sustained engagement with local stakeholders, such as faith leaders, activists, educators, and trusted diaspora figures, offers one part of the solution. In addition to increasing the frequency of engagement with local leaders, we encourage policymakers to adopt a more holistically transparent, humble, and empathetic approach attuned to this era of decreasing trust in national leaders. Such an approach could help Washington gradually rebuild trust and pave the way for a foreign policy that resonates and works for all Americans.

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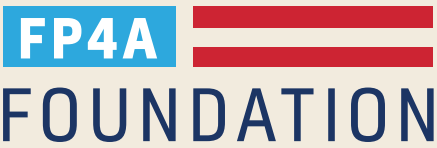

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